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DAVID WILLIAM

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All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

EDITORIAL

This issue is the firstborn of the new Editor and his advisory committee. We send it out in the hope that it will continue to serve, as its predecessors have done, the members of R.D.S. and the progress of religious drama. What is the purpose of this little magazine? That is a question which we have been asking ourselves during the past weeks. It may not seem to be an important question when it is set against the great issues of the second half of this twentieth century after the Incarnation. Yet in a time of stress and division, when the final disaster casts its mushroom-shadow over all human endeavour, we need more than ever to remember that all things move with a purpose. It is perhaps the sense of purpose which more clearly than anything distinguishes the believer from those who live without faith. It means that even in our apparently trivial activities, we must keep on asking the eternal Why. In the Society's recent book *Religious Drama*, one contributor after another reiterated in his own words the reminder that " only the best is good enough for God ". It is in this belief that *Christian Drama* goes forward.

How far the purpose is fulfilled depends largely on you, the readers. This magazine is meant to supply one of the links that can hold together those who believe that drama is a great medium for the propagation and illuminating of faith. Contributions will be welcome and will be carefully considered. We hope also to publish a few letters from members, which will help us all to know each others problems and opinions. We obviously cannot publish anything if we do not receive it; the Editor no doubt has a few idiosyncracies but he is not going to start writing letters to himself!

In this issue we have given some space to the medieval beginnings of Christian drama and to modern productions of medieval plays. It is hoped to make the December issue an international number, with news of recent developments in other countries.

SOME THOUGHTS UPON PRODUCING AMATEURS

ALAN WILSON

Before going too deeply into the subject of amateur acting it is wise to ask oneself this question: why does the average amateur attend a Drama Group at all? Is it because he or she seriously desires to learn something of the Art of Drama and the technique of acting? Is it for relaxation, or is it merely a form of escapism, a way of getting to know people through some form of group activity?

The answer, as I see it after some time spent amongst amateurs, both as teacher and producer, lies in a combination of points two and three. There are, of course, serious students of acting to be found in the amateur groups, but these are so much in the minority that they can be discounted for the purposes of this essay. Those that are real enthusiasts usually end up at Drama School and so become the next generation of professionals. After all, we were all amateurs at one time!

Such being the case, what should be the attitude of the professional producer to his amateur group? Of one thing I am certain—he must never appear to patronise his cast, or to attempt to judge it by professional standards. To do so is fatal and destroys goodwill, the goodwill which must exist before the producer can achieve anything. Too many professionals assume exactly the same method when faced with an amateur Company as they would when producing in, for example, Repertory. They get irritated if the actors do not respond quickly to their direction, forgetting that they *are* amateurs, and being so, do not have either the experience or the attitude to the work of a professional, who has to earn his bread and butter by it.

This is not to say that the amateurs must not be disciplined, or that the producer should be too lax when dealing with them. It is quite essential, of course, to gain the respect of one's cast, and one will not if one treats them with too light a rein. But by insisting too much upon one's professionalism, or by being too academic, one will merely dispel their enthusiasm, and the group will gradually disintegrate. While treating the amateur with firmness it is essential to treat him with consideration and sympathy, even when one feels most suicidal—and one feels this way at almost every rehearsal at one point or another!

For the benefit of any amateur actor or actress who may be reading this, may I here state the things which are most guaranteed to drive me (and I'm sure every other producer) to desperation. Firstly, unpunctuality. The first requirement before any rehearsal of any play, be it Greek Tragedy, Shakespeare, or Ben Travers, is to have a full cast at the beginning. It is no good coming at 7.15 if the rehearsal is called for 7 o'clock. One rarely starts dead on time anyway, and late comers merely aggravate the situation, as well as being most discourteous to those who have managed to appear on time. Many people seem to think that if they only have three lines to say, or only appear as a member of a crowd scene, their presence is not very vital, and that therefore they can arrive late with impunity. This illusion must be dispelled very quickly. It is very difficult for any actor, be he

professional or amateur, to imagine three men is a crowd of twenty, or that the empty space on his left is really the butler, who is offering him a tray of drinks. The butler may only say, " Your drinks, Sir," but it is essential that those drinks are offered, and that, therefore, the actor playing the butler is present. The excuses put forward for lateness at rehearsal are varied, but they usually run on these lines, " Working late "—" Had to put the baby to bed "—" Had seats given me for a Theatre ", etc., etc. The trouble is that these reasons are given in all sincerity. Nevertheless, they are nearly always capable of arrangement with a little thought. I do ask you, dear amateurs, to try to arrange your private lives to fit in with your rehearsals. After all, you did ask to be in the play in the first place. Perhaps when you volunteered, however, you did not realise how much hard work was involved? Please believe me that acting is very hard work, and needs discipline and responsible thinking from all concerned. I would place Reliability far ahead of Ability when casting any play. Most amateurs can respond to production and very satisfying results can be got from non-experienced players, but it is no good having a good actor if he is absent from, or late to, rehearsals.

Next, lack of thought. Many people seem to imagine that once they know their lines and moves they don't need to do anything further. After rehearsal has ended away they go to their homes, and never think about their roles until the next rehearsal. The result is that their performance has not developed, and indeed is less good than it was at the close of the last session when the producer had been working upon them. He now has to do all his work over again. That is one of the reasons why amateur groups need so long for rehearsals. So much time is spent in going over the same ground. The producer must try to instil into his actors the need to build their performances upon the foundation that he gives them, so that when next they appear he can develop them even further.

I said a moment ago that I placed Reliability far ahead of Ability when casting. But how can you judge the reliable or the talented at any audition? The answer is that you can't. In my view too much emphasis is placed upon the value of an audition, both in the professional and amateur theatre. No one, however brilliant, can judge an actor's capacity at one view. Some excellent actors are nervous when faced with reading a part at sight and come over very badly. Likewise, some not very good people make a brave showing at an audition although in performance they fail to live up to expectations. They do not develop their performance any further than at the first reading.

Accordingly I feel that it is a necessary preliminary to any Amateur production that the producer should have three or four sessions with his group in which to size up their capabilities. A Drama Class if you like. A short period in which to get to know your actors as people, to find out their attitude to the work, and to judge their reliability. Then and then only can one get down to casting. These preliminaries need not be taken too seriously. Let the group *enjoy* themselves working on whatever exercises are given them. Let them get to trust you, and to feel that you really do care about *them*. Let them not feel that you are impatient of them, or that you are really only doing the job for the money. They know you are a Pro.—you don't need to insist on it. Let your experience and ability speak for itself. Be firm, confident, and sympathetic and they will follow.

SOME THOUGHTS OF AN AMATEUR

RONALD AYRES

I am an amateur, and am tempted to add " Prahd of it ", though that would be foolish. I become a little hot under the collar at some of the slighting and patronising remarks passed on amateurs in Theatrical and Religious Drama circles. This is not a call " Amateurs of the world unite " or anything so stupid, but it is too easy to laugh. We have all seen bad amateur productions, we have also seen atrocious professional ones. We know that an amateur cannot be as skilled in his craft very often, from sheer lack of time and experience, as the professional. But the amateur actor, producer and group has a tremendous contribution to make to the world of theatre. The word amateur stems from a word meaning love—and a true amateur who brings a love to his performance can often equal and sometimes surpass in the effect of his performance a professional who may bring skill but little heart. But I would not fall into the trap of amateur versus professional, nor should such an idea exist. They are different spheres. What I do ask is that realisation be given to the fact that good amateur theatre can be as exciting as good professional theatre, in its own sphere, and to impress on some who seem slow to believe that there is a great deal of good amateur theatre about. We all admire the professional theatre, support it, love it and cherish it, even in some moments envy those who are in it. But it has not been our calling, and our acting is hobby and not bread and butter, a side line, not the main stream of our life. Our heart and soul is with our professional brethren. At the same time I do think it is time that the best of amateur talent was exploited and encouraged and not simply put on training courses to be taught more, though this is vital too. What are we trying to do in Religious Drama? Are we not trying to spread a Love, an awareness of God, an attitude which looks with God's eyes—Love's eyes, on the world, its people and its problems? Who better then to show the world than the " Amateur ", the lover whose love is not only towards his art but towards his God? Ah, says someone, Love without technique is doomed. I question that, and in any case reverse the phrase and you meet emptiness too in a religious context. If true Love for the art and its message (sorry about that word, but it is necessary) is behind the actor he will submit to the learning of technique sufficient to carry the Love across. We must distinguish in amateur circles between the amateur who does it for love, and the amateur who is coerced into a production to fill a gap. It is not surprising that the latter does badly, but the former can work miracles.

It is time to stop considering all amateurs as madly enthusiastic but no use, or artistically inept, applause loving, ham-handed and slightly funny people. We are not. We love our art and want to perfect it and create all that is best.

I was asked to write about the pitfalls in Amateur Drama, but I will not after all. We know the pitfalls, we know that amateur drama is dangerous ground. But so is professional in our sphere—that is Religious Drama. The professional theatre must be primarily entertainment, and must certainly aim for a profit. It is shackled by finance. It is costly to experiment. But the amateur theatre is a much easier proposition. As an amateur and a Minister I am content to leave pure art for art's sake to the professional. I want a

positive Christian Drama, which will say what it has to say and not leave the audience guessing or having to make up its own mind without any leading. I want propaganda, proclamation, call it what you will. I want to tell people about God and about Christ. I want to show them the stories. And to do it I want enthusiastic, self-sacrificing, hard-working, talented Christian people. Where are they to be found? I suggest in the amateur realm, waiting to be used. To be positive in an age of questions. Not to say that this is not entertainment, of course it must be—but entertainment plus. It 's no use saying people object to being " got at ". It depends how you go; and they must be got at, or how are they to know? It is time to stop wishing for a Christian *West Side Story*. That magnificent production goes as far as it can go. It poses a question in brilliant theatrical terms. By its very posing it in part gives the answer. But it still talks—or sings—of Someplace, Somewhere. Well, as Christians, we know where. Are we to keep silence about it because it is artistically wrong to give the answer? Drama can be used to do it in a wonderful way. We can experiment with our Street plays, our Children's Theatre and our local pieces of Folk Drama.

I have seen many plays in both amateur and professional productions. The effect is quite different. The professional production you can sit and watch and be moved to laughter or tears. The amateur production may lack polish and show signs of shoestring economy—but your heart goes out to it, even perhaps for these reasons. You put effort into watching it. Enthusiasm and Love can carry the day, with a good play or script. Again I am not condoning badness. But surely we can take of the goodness of amateur skill, talent and Love and use it to the Glory of God.

PLAYS AND BOOKS

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There is a place for the professional in the ways of God. There is a high place for art. There is a place for good literature, music, painting and all. All these the R.D.S. must encourage, and I as one who loves them too will rejoice in them. But there is a place for amateurism fired by Love and sprinkled with talent. There is a place for cruder stages, rougher tongues, simpler expressions. Jesus spoke theology to Nicodemus, but told stories to the crowds. The seekers who come by night to a 7.30 professional performance must be catered for of course, but let us not neglect the other folk who wait to hear the Truth. Those who would be flattened by *Godot*, but might be brought to see Life by amateurs on the green showing the story of the Prodigal Son.

No, not the pitfalls. It is time to raise our eyes to the heights of amateur potentialities, to raise our eyes to God and to offer Him not only our polished, machined, professional service, but our clumsier, hand-made, love-wrought offerings. I would like to quote all *The Makers* to end, but perhaps those who have *The Man Born To Be King* on their shelves will take it down and read the introductory poem. I crave forgiveness if I have been unreasonable. I know there are two sides to every question, but have been deliberately lop-sided.

LONDON THEATRE

FRANCES GLENDENNING

This issue of *Christian Drama* contains two articles on the relation between the amateur and professional art of the theatre. It is perhaps worth commenting on this relation, to which this quarterly article bears witness. That amateur authors and producers should get the " feel of the theatre " into their bones is perhaps even more important than for the actor. But his life in the amateur theatre is to a large extent dependent upon the hours and years of patient, persevering, practice of relatively undistinguished professionals as well as upon the inspiration of the neon-lit names. Many amateur groups enjoy the help of professionals and ex-professionals and the advantages of this are often mutual.

If one purpose of this quarterly comment on the London theatre is to ensure that the relation of amateur to professional does not go unnoticed, another is to keep a weather eye on the theatre for its reading of the signs of the times. This is not to prostitute the theatre by probing for sermons in Pinter or prophecy in Wesker, because there is a relationship between theology and the arts, between God's activity in Incarnation and man's activity as artist. The danger is to oversimplify it and to assume that the relationship is established if, for example, a play talks about God.

Family Life

Four plays about families highlight some of the heights and depths of present-day family life. *The Wrong Side of the Park* by John Mortimer (Cambridge Theatre, Feb. 3rd), invites great expectations in the first act but by the third it is clear that some of the writing and some of the characters are not really at home in the theatre. The author is intensely interested in the atmosphere and flavour of an old-fashioned house surrounded by growing blocks of flats but this atmosphere does not really envelop husband and wife (Richard Johnson and Margaret Leighton). Their marital problems are

neither particularly helped nor hindered by the fact that they live on the wrong side of the park. The two themes are not sufficiently interwoven to prevent diffusion of interest. The director was Peter Hall.

Look on Tempests by Joan Henry (Comedy Theatre) is a very competent play about a young wife whose husband is sentenced to two years' imprisonment for homosexuality. The conflict is mainly between the wife (Vanessa Redgrave) and her mother-in-law (Gladys Cooper) as they struggle to reach an acceptance of this situation. The authoress keeps the play on a very tight rein but there is real depth of perception and flashes of warm feeling.

Change for the Angel by Bernard Kops (The Arts Theatre Club, March 1st) is more of a documentary than a drama. The family have their rows, the kitchen sink is much in evidence but there is no real dramatic action. The mother's death is nothing more than an event in the play and accomplishes nothing more than an ordinary break-up of a family. The visitor who appears on the most tenuous of excuses and acts as a kind of catalyst to bring the teenage son to greater self-awareness, never really gets inside the play. There is plenty of acute observation of family, friends and feuds in this Angel area of London, but it never really gets off the ground to become dramatic in speech or action.

Never Had It So Good (Theatre Royal, E. 15, March 8th) was written by John Wiles for the new Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. " How does one reduce a city to a piece of theatre? " asks the author in a programme note, for the new Coventry is the main character in the play. This is the crux of the matter and it is doubtful whether *Never Had It So Good* will ever become known as the " Coventry play ". The cosmopolitan character of Coventry was well pointed by a cast which included Welsh, Irish, West Indians, Londoners and one family of natives. The fortunes of the Grobe family from London are one of many strands in the play which takes time off to have a go at religion, education, sex, trade unionism, and race. The general atmosphere was reminiscent of some post-war " religious " drama with its mixture of poetry and preaching, stylised and naturalistic speech and movement and there was even a beer box (uncovered). The production was not sufficiently firm to add any sense of direction to this series of interesting but inconclusive impressions. Direction was by the late Bryan Bailey and Richard Martin.

" Religious " Drama

Inherit the Wind (St. Martin's Theatre, March 16th) by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee is a play based on a historical conflict between " religion " and " science " in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. The interest of the play, however, does not lie in the doubtful conflict between Genesis and Darwin but in any threat to freedom of speech and thought. The audience is free to make its own parallels with recent or contemporary events and there is enough fire and heat generated to rouse even the most complacent accepter of civil liberties to be eternally vigilant. There is a vivid demonstration of official religion in opposition to truth and freedom and also the not unfamiliar experience of seeing the " atheist " as the best exponent and defender of true religion. The heat of the weather is conveyed to the audience as convincingly and consistently as the heat of feeling. There was an outstanding performance by Andrew Cruickshank; the direction was by Terence Kilburn.

The Naming of Murderers' Rock (Royal Court) by Frederick Bland has much that is unremarkable but also two most memorable effects. One is the performance by Colin Blakely of a man standing trial for murder, an inarticulate, illiterate Irishman. The other is the powerful polemic against capital punishment which accumulates during the play. That the author, or at any rate the director, intends the play to be seen in this light is attested by the programme note, " There will be no curtain call at the end of the play." The curtain falls precisely at the moment when the trapdoor in the scaffold would drop the convicted men to their death. There is a fraction of silence before the applause and a rather stunned audience emerges, groping its way back to the trivialities of life and London transport.

Colin Blakely is largely responsible for this religious atmosphere at the end. It is his progress from sullen monosyllable during the prosecution to terrified and terrible outburst at the foot of the scaffold that opens us to the horrors of this death. This is an example of a successful propaganda play because the author never steps out of his dramatic medium to speak against capital punishment but presents his argument entirely through dramatic situations and leaves the audience to draw its own conclusions.

Musicals

The Most Happy Fella (Coliseum, April 21st) by Frank Loesser will probably have a long run, but to me it seemed utterly " square " in the most depressing and lifeless sense of that word.

Follow that Girl (Vaudeville) by Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds has succeeded their *Salad Days*. There are one or two numbers which suggest that the authors are aware that there are musicals of a different kind and that they could write like that if they wanted to. But on the whole they stick to their original formula.

The Novel and the Biography

Santha Rama Rau has made " . . . an excellent and sensitive dramatic version of *A Passage to India* " (Comedy). This is Mr. E. M. Forster's own comment on what has happened to his novel. No doubt one suffers from *idées fixes* about characters with whom one has been acquainted for years, so that Enid Lorimer's entrance as Mrs. Moore brought a shock of disillusionment. She was a kind of grey eminence in the novel but in the play she appears in such hideous and vulgar clothes that it is impossible to believe for example, that she would ever have the sensitivity to take off her shoes before entering a mosque. She speaks some of Forster's lines but never really gets inside the play. On the other hand it was a pleasure to meet Dr. Aziz who sprang cleanly from novel to play, a fine performance by Zia Mohyeddin. The play came from the Oxford Playhouse, director Frank Hauser.

In *Ross* (Theatre Royal, Haymarket, May 12th), Terence Rattigan has made a " dramatic portrait " of T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia). For those who know something of the biographical and autobiographical background of this extraordinary and outstanding man, the play makes a vivid and absorbing chronicle. For those who go to see Alec Guinness in no matter what, the play must inevitably be episodic and occasionally baffling. In this play an author gives an actor perhaps the most difficult exit in the history of the

theatre. Lawrence is captured and tortured by a Turkish garrison. It i this event which compels him to face for the first time, desires in himsel whose recognition he dreads and against which perhaps he has built up hi armour of self-discipline. In his lifetime Lawrence (and Ross and Shaw hi aliases) was always something of a contradiction to himself and to hi friends. It is hardly to be expected that an audience will resolve this con tradiction by watching the silent, agonised exit of Guinness after the offstag torture. Nevertheless it was possible to recognise this exit as a crucial poin even without any precise definition as to what had happened to his body o to his mind. The director was Glen Byam Shaw.

The Old Vic

Peter Potter's production of *What Every Woman Knows* (April 12th), in celebration of the centenary of the birth of J. M. Barrie, seemed to prove tha this is a play for professionals only. The thin ice that covers patches o sentimentality and mawkishness in Barrie are difficult for amateurs t negotiate but with Maggie Smith as Maggie Wylie and a confident production full of imaginative details and magnificent colour, the thin ice is hardly noticeable.

The most exciting character in John Neville's production of *Henry V* (May 31st) is the Chorus, clad in blue jersey and raincoat. Donald Houston's Henry makes a good general but lacks any kingly grandeur.

Rhinoceros and The Caretaker

Sir Laurence Olivier's role in *Rhinoceros* (Royal Court, April 28th) by Ionesco is the greatest attraction of this play and rightly so; without Olivier the play would be difficult to sustain. The idea of a world where the greatest temptation is to turn into a rhinoceros is full of possibilities which are brilliantly conceived by Ionesco and executed by Orson Welles and his cast. But the play adds up to a number of questions which confuse rather than clarify. The final scene is of Bérenger, a hitherto insignificant and rather drunken clerk, defying the rest of the world now composed only of rhinoceroses. Olivier cannot fail to engender admiration for this surprising resistance member but the curtain has not long fallen before one is nagged by such questions as, "Who was I admiring and what was he resisting?" The audience does not want copybook answers, but to be left with a heap of questions and no indication where to look for the answers smacks of irresponsibility. The play opened at the Royal Court and transferred to the Strand.

The weaknesses of *Rhinoceros* (and of many of the other plays noticed here) are highlighted by another play which opened almost simultaneously, Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (Arts Theatre Club, April 27th). The play has only three characters, two brothers and a Welsh tramp; the action of the play centres on the efforts of the tramp to establish some kind of human relationship with the two brothers. Donald Pleasence plays the tramp with a wealth of observation and imagination, careful for his feet and shocked at the lack of facilities for making tea. The extraordinary brothers are also perfectly embodied by Peter Woodthorpe, slow moving, speaking and thinking, whose ambition is to build a garden shed, and by Alan Bates, an erratic, eccentric, unpredictable property-owner who speaks like a machine gun and dreams of incomparable schemes of interior decoration. Both of

A SCENE FROM HAROLD PINTER'S *THE CARETAKER*
DONALD PLEASENCE (DAVIES) COMPLAINS TO PETER WOODTHORPE (ASTON) THAT
HIS SAWING OF WOOD IS KEEPING HIM AWAKE

them look to the tramp for his interpretation of themselves to each other and both of them independently invite him to become caretaker of the derelict house, owned by the younger brother and occupied by the elder. In the end he is rejected by them both.

The effect of this play is no neat and tidy conclusion or solution but one is left with far more than admiration for one man's performance, as in *Rhinoceros*. The play itself makes a tremendous impact partly because Mr. Pinter has such an infallible feeling for what belongs to the theatre. His characters are as inarticulate and as cliché-ridden as the next man but they are completely at home in the theatre, and are never weakened by "fine writing". They are both tragic and farcical, pitiable and exasperating. "Great tides of laughter" is one of the press phrases chosen to advertise the play since its transfer to the Duchess theatre. And this is true, the audience rocks with laughter at words and expressions, at situations and at surprise movements. Mr. Pinter is also a master of silence and uses it to convey triviality as well as profundity, sterility as well as depth of feeling.

The Caretaker is an impressive and exhilarating dramatic experience of an intensity suggested in his one-act plays, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Room* (Royal Court, March 8th). Mr. Pinter would be an excellent example for any "religious dramatist", with his scrupulous regard for what is proper to the theatre and his artistry in keeping within those limits. This is the best play in the London Theatre.

THE BEAST AND THE ANGEL

GRAHAM SUTER

(On Sunday, May 22nd, Theatre Group productions presented an addition to their repertoire of poetry recitals, spoken by SYLVIA READ and WILLIAM FRY, directed by JOHN DOWNING, in the Recital Room of the Festival Hall.)

In the Spring Issue of *Christian Drama*, the Rev. Ronald Ayres ended his enthusiastic review of Theatre Group Productions' *The Unquiet Journey* with a hope for more. Although unable to be at that recital, I find it hard to believe that its successor, so far from being disappointing, did not in some ways exceed hope; particularly, perhaps, in the duologues.

The programme treats of the dual nature of man, in whom the Beast fights with the Angel for dominance, at times contriving to corrupt pure joy and love into hedonism and lust, or the aesthetic capacity of exhilarated youth into mere matter for adult vanity; but powerless, at other times, against unselfish love, faith, courage and, as it must always be, before the sublime mystery of the Resurrection.

The material, gay, profound, dramatic by turns, ranges in rich diversity from the anonymous *Mad Tom's Song* of about 1500 A.D., through Spenser, Beaumont, Vaughan, to Eliot, Sitwell, Patric Dickinson, Auden; and, besides poems, it includes effective scenes from Browning's *Pippa Passes* (surprise to me!), James Forsyth's *Héloïse* and Dickinson's *Theseus and the*

Minotaur, all most successful in performance—and also what was for most of us, I think, the most delightful " find " of the evening—a passage from *The Celestial Omnibus* by E. M. Forster.

Even a sun-glutton like me, however, enjoys a tropical climate more when the nights are cool, and it was, I feel, a mistake (though, happily, a fairly minor one) to link the bright " days " of this programme with " introductions " that were insufficiently distinct in the manner of their writing and of their delivery (marked, in fact, only by formal movement). A restful contrast would have set off the individual pieces better, restored our appetite and mental alertness, and, indeed, made it easier to retain a sense of Theme.

When, slightly to paraphrase the brochure, poetry is to be spoken " not sedately, though expertly . . . rhythmically and dramatically performed to an assembled company ", that performance and its direction obviously affect our enjoyment as much as the written matter itself. Indeed, since in an anthology each of us will have his own preferences, perhaps even dislikes, our sense of pleasure (and, it may be, new insights into former blind spots) will depend very much on the theatrical efficiency of the " playing ". With the reservation already made about the linking matter, I find myself reaching for the bouquets.

John Downing's exemplary direction gets to the heart of the matter, and with a selective economy of action, achieves striking truth, variety, and point. Sylvia Read, although a little limited vocally, like most women, speaks and acts with clarity, judgement and feeling. I was deeply moved by her interpretation of the boy in Forster's *Celestial Omnibus*, bright-eyed and radiant in the heavenly sunlight. William Fry starts with the advantage of a man's wider range, exploiting it very fully with imaginative appositeness and power. The strain of sustaining such a programme (as I know, from my last two years) is enormous, and in the intimacy of the Recital Room it was at moments a little apparent. If public support gives them increasing experience and assurance, their touch will soften; and then this team, obviously intelligent, humble, gifted, and working in fruitful sympathy, will be irresistible.

Theatre Group Productions, we hear, plan a new recital at the Festival Hall on November 10th. If you can get there, make the effort: you are more likely to be thrilled than disappointed. If you cannot get there, and obviously many cannot, why despair? If you can provide them with an accoustically reasonable room, with a platform of some sort (if possible), and seats for an audience large enough to cover their modest fee and expenses, you can hear any or all of their repertoire. Member groups and branches might think seriously about this.

THE BAIKIE CHARIVARI

GRAHAM SUTER

(*A rehearsed reading given by the Catholic Stage Guild, in the hall of Notre Dame de France, Leicester Square, Sunday, June 12th.*)

The Scottish Theatre has a great relish and talent for theatrical effects, verbal and mental dexterity, for sheer fun mixed with seriousness. James Bridie provided all these in his last play, *The Baikie Charivari*, which he called

a miracle play, and which, after considerable success in Scotland, was given its first showing in London on June 12th, in the form of a rehearsed reading by professional actors of the Catholic Stage Guild.

The hero, a modern Punch, is Sir James Macarthur Pounce-Pellott, a former colonial governor. Having to start life anew in his retirement, he seeks to make a better job of it, and finds himself deluged, to the point of revolt, with the advice and the claims to infallible completeness of representatives of Religion, Communism, the Civil Service (" the new Silent Service "), the arts and science; the mixture well stirred from time to time by the Devil himself. On these latter occasions the dialect effloresces into what seems to be richly matured " Gorbals ", a wee bit hard on the Sassenach understanding.

The conditions of a reading obviously do rather leave one guessing how effective these " vision " scenes might be, given the full works. More seriously, on these occasions, alas, professionals just cannot find time for *full* rehearsals, and although most of the scenes came off quite well, it must be admitted that the long last main scene—an after-dinner argument, calling for resourceful use of movement and great mental subtlety and point—declined into a sad resemblance of a first reading in a B.B.C. Studio.

As expected, the cast all offered interesting characterisations and played with spirit, although it is perhaps fair to single out Eric Woodburn for the completeness of his Rev. Dr. Marcus Beadle, and Henry Vidon for his astonishing feat of taking over the leading part (Sir James Pounce-Pellott) from the unfortunately ill Mr. McKechnie, at very short notice, and managing even to get across a large proportion of the subtleties of this difficult rôle.

The chief aim of the reading, was, of course, to introduce the play, and it was notably successful in that most of the audience would obviously have welcomed a chance to see it again, in its theatrical fullness.

THE STORY OF JEREMIAH

M. WILD

The Story of Jeremiah, by John Hunter, Norman Spooner and Vera Allen, was performed by members of the United Parishes of Gateshead Youth Club in April. The performers were all what are called Teddy boys and girls; none of them had ever been on a stage before or had anything to do with theatre, and the majority of the audience was composed of fellow club members and their friends and relations. The composition of the audience is mentioned because its intimacy with so self-conscious a cast added a certain amount of difficulty to both producer and players by deliberate and accidental distractions.

The translation of the story in the Book of Jeremiah into modern teenage idiom was inspired, and lyrics and music fitted the story, the mood and the people. The theme of the book, that the service of God is often arduous, lonely and unpopular, but that he never leaves his faithful servants without strength and comfort, came over unmistakably and with force.

THE STORY OF JEREMIAH
UNITED PARISHES OF GATESHEAD YOUTH CLUB (CO. DURHAM)

There were many really fine lines in the play, both spoken and sung, and the narrator's refrain was especially telling. The songs were haunting and are still clear in the memory after two months of a very busy life. Particularly I think should be mentioned " This is the Time to be Young " which was obviously enjoyed and entirely understood by the chorus, " Peace " and " Go Home Gyppos ".

Unfortunately many lines were lost. One cause, only affecting the " foreigners ", was the difficulty of understanding the very peculiar and rapidly-spoken Tyneside accent. The other, affecting all, was the microphone arrangement, which would have been difficult for even experienced actors who were not giraffes.

The chief actors, especially Jeremiah and Barush, were remarkably good and succeeded in making their characters convincing and real, and of the lesser ones all gave something. The Chorus also were lively throughout and were well in the spirit of the thing. Special mention must be made of the narrator who was consistently good throughout.

If there is a doubt of anything, it is the use of a long passage of unadulterated Authorized Version, spoken " off " as the Voice of God. This was the only part of the performance when the attention of the audience was not held. The Authorized Version uses language not comprehensible to ordinary people for whom this play is meant, and is, I felt, too strong a contrast to the rest. Would not modern Queen's English be clearer, and more fitting in the circumstances?

One other question that rose in my mind was whether when inexperienced actors are playing to an audience who, if the members have an imagination, have never used it at all, some simple scenery could not be arranged with advantage.

However, these are small things, and I must say that we came away from the hall with a great feeling of exhilaration. We had seen and heard and heartily enjoyed a play splendidly adapted for performance by, and to, the modern young, performed with great zest by those of whom many respectable citizens will believe no good. It was a triumph for authors, director (Martyn Colborn), organiser and also, the Teddies of the Gateshead Clubs.

THE MYSTERY OF MARY

Produced at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, U.S.A., March 23rd–27th, 1960.

E. MARTIN BROWNE

In the north of this middle-western state, about 100 miles from Chicago, there is a strong centre of Roman Catholic education. The University of Notre Dame has 5,000 male students; and though its academic standards used to be lower than its lofty position in football, that is all being changed and it now attracts many eminent teachers. Across the main road from this huge campus lies that of Saint Mary's College for girls, with 1,000 students. They are, as will be seen, in a fortunate position from a social point of view, but also from an educational, for this College has maintained high standards

nd a liberal view of education since it was founded by the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1844. Its present President, Sister M. Madeleva, is a great ttle woman whose qualities can be judged from her recent autobiography *My First Seventy Years* (Macmillan). She determined that in the fine ,400-seat theatre which St Mary's recently built the two colleges should tage an English Mystery Cycle, and invited my wife and me to direct it. his was pioneering, she said, and so indeed it proved: none of the players ad ever met medieval drama on this scale before. At first they found t hard to enter into the simple, direct contact with their audience and to nd real characters in the completely un-psychologised persons of the play. But the faith which they held in common with these persons, and with their reator of 440 years ago, enabled them to leap the gap and give truly and leeply-felt performances: just as the verse-patterns and alliterations of the ncient speech helped them to a delivery so clear and carrying that it sur-rised everybody.

The Mystery of Mary was my adaptation of a large part of *Ludus Coventriae* —which is not, of course, the Coventry Cycle but almost certainly that of incoln. (It is also known as the Hegge Cycle, after the owner of the manu-cript.) It dates from about 1420, being later than the other surviving cycles, nd contains some unique features, many of them concerned with Mary's art in the story of our redemption. Accordingly, I built the play round her, eginning with the legends of her parents, Joachim and Anne, Mary's youth n the temple and marriage to Joseph—a comically unwilling suitor who ecomes the tenderest of guardians—and concluding the first part with the inest Annunciation in mediaeval drama. The second part continues the criptural story, except for one characteristically medieval interpolation, Trial by Ordeal to which Joseph and Mary are brought by Slanderer and Backbiter (two of several Morality-type characters who suggest that with his Cycle the drama is in transition from Mystery to Morality Play). At he Presentation in the Temple, I used Simeon's prophecy as a "flash-orward" to the Passion and Resurrection, so that the climax of the story vas reached.

This story is shown, scene for scene, by Giotto in his Arena Chapel frescoes t Padua: and it seemed good to appoint him designer-in-chief—in other words, to design our multiple set from his architectural and landscape back-grounds and our costumes from his cut and colour-scheme. Choosing our naterials carefully for colour, we were able to get very economically the effect of clean colouring and monumental shapes that characterises the rescoes, and to match it with the graceful gravity of the characters' move-ment. The pictures are full of dramatic feeling, and helped the actors very much to enter deeply into their parts.

Music was supplied by the *Schola Cantorum* of the College (I do not know etter Plainsong singing by women's voices anywhere), with a mixed poly-phonic choir and a small brass ensemble. It was all of the fifteenth or earlier enturies, chosen, recorded and relayed by Dr. H. Bertholt Dietz.

In an auditorium, bigger than any "straight" Broadway theatre, the tudent-actors succeeded in establishing a remarkably close *rapport* with heir audiences. Of course the fact that a majority of the spectators shared he shining faith of the cast, which created a unified strength on the stage,

helped a great deal: but middle-western Catholics are as matter-of-fact as other middle-westerners and most of them had come expecting to be bored. In staging the show, we brought it all as near to them as possible: but even so, its overwhelming impact proved that neither age nor distance can defeat the power of these old scripts from the age of faith, if they are acted for all they are worth.

THE YORK MYSTERIES

JOAN NICHOLL

The scene of this year's York Mystery Plays was set in the Abbey Gardens against a large angular erection of unpainted wood and in no way used the soft grey stone of the Abbey walls. At first sight this seemed out of keeping both with the colour and shape of the background but once the play started one realised that the set cleverly linked the old with the new.

The opening was simple and undramatic. God the Father walked alone in the void. Then began the drama of Creation culminating in Adam, a beautiful scene in which God's pleasure in man was poignantly portrayed. Robert Eddison's performance as the Almighty was outstanding in strength and dignity. But Heaven itself was disappointing, lacking a sense of reverence and awe. The costumes here did not help as they were unimaginative and prosaic. It was quite apparent which of the Angels were destined to fall: their black tights and head-dresses were plainly to be seen before they cast off their cloaks.

Lucifer—as played by Harold Lang—was the embodiment of the pride of self-love, and faintly reminiscent of a Teddy Boy, but the inadequacy of Heaven robbed his fall of drama. His conception of the part had a modern ring which made a link with the following scenes.

The Virgin, played by Louise Liversidge, was a portrayal of fresh and untried youth, human and modern, typified by her simple and surprising costume of ankle length dress and high crowned straw hat tied with ribbons. The imaginative touch when she blew a ladybird from her fingers and in doing so, saw the angel Gabriel was further evidence of the spontaneity of this production as was her inexperienced handling of her first child. The scenes with the shepherds and the kings were moving and real. Reginald Dench gave an outstanding performance as Joseph, humorous and warm, yet infused with spiritual understanding.

A complete change of atmosphere heralded the second half of the play. Before this we had watched a story unfolding, now the characterisation was such as to make us feel we were ourselves taking part. During the scene of the Baptism, women washed their clothes in Jordan, fishermen mended their nets, laughing, chattering and mildly mocking John the Baptist as he preached repentance to them. Stanley Davey handled this difficult part with understanding and probability. It was the meeting place of the young happy virile Christ and the prophet so reminiscent of the Old Testament.

Tom Criddle gave a dedicated performance as the Christ, full of the warmth of human personality, radiant and compassionate, yet strong. In

the scenes following, the temptations, the healing of the sick, the raising of Lazarus, etc., this was very marked, and he maintained this strength to the end.

The vindictive Annas and cold calculating Caiaphas in contrast to the sensual, violent, yet unhappy Pilate made the setting of the trial scene, which was played against a background of coloured cloth, giving the impression of an interior courtroom. The force and action of this scene was memorable with its tremendous interplay of personalities.

The skill of production in the terrible scene of the flogging, which took place high up on the scaffolding, half lit, with the roars and jeers of the crowd below was masterly in the delicacy of its handling. One longed not to be there, but was absorbed in the tragedy. From this time the broken and tortured body of Christ was so vividly portrayed that the crucifixion was almost unbearable. An immense cross towered into the sky and the vast machinery used for its erection and for the nailing seemed symbolical of the crushing weight of the evil in man throughout the ages.

After the magnitude of this scene the fact that High Heaven had throughout lacked reality made it difficult to resolve the play on a high note. This was due in part to the construction of the plays themselves. To modern minds not atune to thoughts of eternal damnation the end does not seem in harmony with the life of love and sacrifice we had already witnessed.

The standard of acting was uniformly high and amateur and professional blended into an indistinguishable whole. Each minor part created a cameo of character which carried conviction. The crowd work was admirable.

The costumes were mostly made of woollen materials, giving a sense of weight and importance to the action. Colour was used symbolically, the disciples in varying shades of blue contrasting with the scarlet and purple of Pharisaic and Roman domination. The crowd was in muted colours of soft green, brown, grey and coral which blended with the unpainted wood of the background.

The sensitive imagination of Mr. David Giles shone throughout this production.

THE PLAY OF DANIEL

CHRISTOPHER LE FLEMING

The Play of Daniel, heralded first by a gramophone record (Brunswick AXTL. 1086), followed by a *de luxe* edition (Oxford University Press) and a bi-lingual version of text and notation (Faith Press for the Plainsong and Medieval Song Society) has now been seen as well as heard.

The New York Pro Musica group, after visiting Wells and Oxford, brought *Daniel* to Westminster Abbey for a week in June. This medieval music-drama, put together by members of the choir-school at Beauvais (*c.* 1200) has been brought back to life from a thirteenth-century copy in the British Museum. The music in this " revival " is directed by Noah Greenberg and the production by E. Martin Browne.

However valuable the available literature and recording, there can be no doubt at all that the visual impact of a production brings *Daniel* into the

TWELFTH-CENTURY MUSICAL AT WESTMINSTER
DANIEL READS THE WRITING ON THE WALL
DANIEL (CHARLES BRESSLER) PRONOUNCES HIS DOOM TO KING DARIUS (BRAYTON LEW
AND HIS PRINCE (RUSSELL OBERLIN)

category of a thrilling and deeply-satisfying experience. Martin Browne's production in Westminster Abbey was centred on a raised platform in front of the high altar, but also made imaginative use of the whole of the Abbey. The entry of King Darius and his forces through the darkened nave was but one of many dramatic effects; on the stage, by the art of grouping, colour and dresses, it was as though figures long familiar in paintings and decoration came to life while we looked at them.

Since the play is produced in the original Latin, a Narrator is used to keep twentieth-century audiences abreast of affairs on the stage. Special lines by W. H. Auden (included in the Oxford edition) were declaimed by John Westbrook in monk's habit from the pulpit.

The singing and instrumental parts were realised with skill, sensibility, conviction and vitality by every member of the New York Pro Musica group. Our appreciation of the music has been strangely deepened by resent memories of Britten and *Noyes Fludde*. The music of *Daniel* shows, by comparison, how vividly Britten has caught the spirit of medieval drama and, in his music, transmuted it into a language of our time. To the New York Pro Musica our gratitude is profound; all concerned with this event have conspired to give a new impulse to religious drama, the effects of which are bound to be far-reaching and significant.

MEDIEVAL MUSIC DRAMA

DENIS STEVENS

" A grimace of friendly incredulity was turned in my direction by one of the musical experts of the British Broadcasting Corporation a few years back when he heard the announcer speaking into the microphone my introductory remarks to the performance of the sequence *Laetabundus*. The sequence was described to the listening public on that occasion as the parent of oratorio and the grandparent of modern drama."

This unusual introduction to H. M. Bannister's *Anglo-French Sequelae* refers to a broadcast in the late nineteen-twenties, when Dom Anselm Hughes had arranged for the listening public what was probably their first taste of plain-song, performed outside the liturgy. All except a mere handful of medieval sequences have remained in a state of banishment from the liturgy since the Council of Trent (1545–63) and their fate has thus run parallel to that of the drama, which emerged from sequence and trope in the tenth and eleventh centuries. If the drama was nourished in the bosom of the Church, its subsequent career was in the lap of the gods. No sooner was it thrust out of the holy precincts than it returned in a new guise, once more to edify and to amuse, once more to slip from its precarious perch through some human failing in taste and demeanour.

From the fourth-century Council of Elvira onwards, elders of the Church had objected in the strongest terms to the association of any of its members with jugglers, circus clowns, actors, musicians, and all similar suspects. If the sinners repented, all well and good, but they had to promise faithfully to abandon their wicked métier. The peculiar thing is that when troping began such edicts temporarily ceased. Even the venerable and immensely learned

Abbé Migne confessed himself unable to find any ecclesiastical denunciation of the theatre during the eleventh century; and for the tenth and twelfth he could find only one each. It is not unlikely that this singular withdrawal of anathemata coincides with a softening of the Church's attitude towards dramatic representations, for it was just about this time that the liturgical drama began to make its presence felt.

Secular drama was of course familiar to clerics who could read, and the classics were by no means unknown. The plays of Terence, elegant in technique and construction, appealed to the German nun Hrosvitha, but their contents appalled her. Her own plays were nevertheless modelled on Terence's style, and though their subjects dealt with the lives of the saints, the frightening descriptions of torture and martyrdom might in turn appal a modern audience capable of finding Terence harmless. Hrosvitha's plays contain no music, yet her knowledge of music (absorbed from Boethius and Aurelian of Réomé) is clearly shown in the play about the hermit Paphnuce.

Early miracle-plays referring to martyrdom rarely omit that horrific element which drew crowds as readily then as X-films do today; nor do the plays based on Old Testament subjects forgo the occasional witty obscenity so beloved of the later *commedia dell'arte*. It is extremely doubtful, moreover, whether the frankly anatomical descriptions of Eve in Adam de la Hales' *Li Jus Adan* would ever get past a modern censor, though a canon of San Domenica in Sessa who wrote his own version of the Adam and Eve story and insisted on playing the part of Adam stark naked met with apparently enthusiastic approval.

In spite of councils and edicts there were no hard-and-fast rules about drama in church. What was tolerated in the south was abhorred in the north, and what one age applauded the next age found abominable. The musical and scenic features persisted right through the development of drama whether inside or outside the Church, and just as the early scenic effects were restricted to such devices as a mobile star to guide the Magi, so the earliest music was monophonic. By the time Brunelleschi and Cecca in Florence and Leonardo da Vinci in Milan had perfected the *ingegni teatrali* so as to permit flying angels, moving clouds, tongues of fire, and various other delights for the eye, music had assumed a polyphonic garb and was performed by a great variety of singers and instrumentalists.

All this was developed slowly over a period of 500 years, and during that time the number of texts and plays increased immeasurably. One remarkably comprehensive modern collection of texts provides more than 300 examples of the Easter sepulchre drama, yet the picture is still not complete. Only recently two manuscripts of a Dutch Easter play were discovered in the Royal Library at The Hague, and although they follow the customary pattern of this wide-spread type of liturgical drama, they contain important variants which underline the local character of so many plays penned first by the inexhaustibly inventive monks.

From the Easter plays the first Nativity plays were derived; "*Quem quaeritis in sepulchro*" became "*Quem quaeritis in praesepio*". Passion plays were lengthy and involved huge casts of players, for they were spread over Passion Sunday and Holy Week. The Peregrinus plays usually deal with the journey to Emmaus, while those featuring the Magi are sometimes extended

to include Herod also, and he not infrequently becomes the main figure. Yet there remains a close association between play and liturgy, for the Easter drama grew from a troped introit, and many of the other plays end with "*Te Deum*", thus indicating that they followed the last responsory of Matins and were in turn followed by the chanting of the song of St Ambrose and St Augustine, Rutebeuf's *Miracle of Theophilus* is one such play, and similar examples are found in the famous collection of St Benoît-sur-Loire. *The Play of Daniel* written by students at Beauvais Abbey in the twelfth century, also ends with a verse of the hymn "*Nuntium vobis*" foretelling of Christ's birth, and the incipit "*Te Deum*".

The Beauvais students appear to have taken the idea for a Daniel play from an early drama by the wandering scholar Hilarius. Their new version was probably performed on the Sunday after Christmas every year, and as time went on additions and alterations would have been made. At some stage an entirely fresh manuscript copy was produced, very likely in the mid-thirteenth century, and it is this version of the text and music of *The Play of Daniel* that eventually found its way to the British Museum.

The characters in the play include Belshazzar and his Queen, Darius, Wise Men, Envious Counsellors, the prophet Habbakuk, angels, satraps and soldiers—and of course Daniel, to whom some of the most beautiful and impressive music is assigned. It is noteworthy that his first song, alternating with verses sung by the princes, brings in a snatch of French, recalling the vernacular accretions in the "*Sponsus*" text from Limoges. The Latin of the Beauvais students, while not invariably perfect, is always elegant and lively. Its metre and rhymes fit the music to perfection, no matter whether it is a processional piece, or *conductus*, like "*Ecce Rex Darius*" (which begins the second half of the play), or a heart-rending lament such as Daniel's "*Heu, heu, heu, quo casu sortis*".

No indication of instrumental support is given in the original manuscript, but the use of instruments is indicated by documents and illuminations, and it is certain that instrumental colour was one of the brightest features of the so-called dark Middle Ages.

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THE RELEVANCE OF MEDIEVAL DRAMA

RAYMOND CHAPMAN

When the Roman Empire fell into decay, Europe was left without a dramatic tradition. The other literary forms continued to be practised in countries where Roman civilisation had been strong, but the theatres were closed and the actors dispersed. Admittedly, there was little true drama that remained amid the barbarities into which the theatre had degenerated. One of the pleasant ironies of literary history is that the Church, which was largely responsible for closing the decadent Roman theatre, later became the source of a new dramatic form. As early as the ninth century, short passages of

dialogue were sometimes inserted into the liturgy on the greater festivals. From this simple beginning there grew the many cycles of mystery plays. At first in the churches, later outside their walls and eventually on mobile stages, the Christian story was acted. By the fifteenth century, the trade guilds had taken over the performances; a whole day would be taken up by a series of plays that told the history of mankind from Creation to Judgement.

Here then is one important difference between medieval drama and the religious drama of the present day. Medieval drama grew out of the liturgy by isolating and developing those parts of worship which are an enactment, in symbolic form, of divinely-contrived events. Today our attitude is rather that a medium exists through which religious beliefs can be communicated. We have a dramatic tradition which we believe, quite rightly of course, to be suitable for the propagation of faith. But does our drama spring directly from our religious life as a natural mode of its expression? Is it a joyful overflowing from organised worship, or is it more often a tight-lipped effort to " get it across "?

It is often rightly said that all great drama is religious drama. The medieval period is the time of sacred drama, the greatest drama on specifically devotional subjects that the Christian era has known. It was the only drama, and it led in the end to the humanist Renaissance drama which in its turn began the long development towards the modern theatre in which our new sacred drama has its place. Bad plays on Christian themes are often accused of " medievalism ", but that is precisely the quality which they generally lack. Much of the drama that is offered in sincerity and devotion suffers from a stiff detachment that is far from the medieval way of doing things. Medieval sacred drama is never static: it bounces with life and enthusiasm. Nor does it suffer from the painful archaisms which often disfigure modern plays. The fact that Middle English is now old-fashioned is something which its speakers could not have been expected to foresee. The medieval dramatists used the current idiom of their own time, whereas too many modern writers use a form of sixteenth-century English. A combination of ancient Palestinian costumes—not that we have much idea of what they were really like—with the English of Cranmer, is regarded as being peculiarly reverent. Our proper love for the language of the Authorized Version of the Bible should not deceive us into thinking that *thou* is a more " religious " word than *you*.

Men of the Middle Ages were not troubled by scruples about historical accuracy. For them the Christian story was a living reality which they were constantly retelling in a manner that all would understand. Around the events of faith they would improvise to suit the immediate situation. Theirs was the familiarity that does not breed contempt. The Church governed their daily lives as well as their official worship; the realms of heaven and hell were close to them as they worked and played. Therefore they had no fears about representing the Persons of the Trinity on their crude stages, even in such a way as to suggest tritheism. Yet their devotion compensated for any theological weaknesses; a devotion so great and firm that they could find room for laughter within it. There is a good deal of humour in these medieval plays, sometimes to an extent that the pious modern mind may regard as excessive. In the plays of Noah, his wife was almost always shown as a

hrew who scorned his shipbuilding activities and could scarcely be per-uaded to enter the Ark. The famous Wakefield Nativity play has a scene hat seems blasphemous to many people, in which a shepherd hides a stolen amb in a cradle. We may not want to go so far, but let us never be afraid f laughter.

Whatever devices are used, the outstanding quality of medieval drama is ts immediacy, its obvious relevance to the lives of those who wrote and erformed it. There are no worries about anachronisms: a Nativity shepherd an talk of the *Paternoster* and soldiers at the Crucifixion can speak with amiliarity about jousting in a tournament. For these are all people who ould be immediately recognisable to their contemporaries and who yet can ake their part in the mysteries of religion. Do we not today try too hard to ind modern "equivalents" of biblical characters, instead of bringing in eople from the streets around us? The world of the medieval plays is always he world of here and now, transformed by the divine events that are taking lace. The abiding theme is always that of Redemption. Almost every play nds with an ascription of praise, a reminder that we have witnessed an act f worship as well as an entertainment.

In their late period, these plays are by no means the crude efforts that many people suppose them to be. They bear the seeds of comedy and tragedy which were later to grow into the Elizabethan triumph. Sacred drama can never be fully tragic or comic in the traditional senses, but it partakes of both. Even if these distinctions are those of the critic rather than of the working dramatist, they express aspects of human experience which we can ill afford to neglect. There is dramatic structure in these plays too, a sense of climax which does not fail to move the modern audience when the production is good. The plays are anonymous and we have only glimpses of the conditions under which they were produced. Yet they are no mere improvisations but developed works of art. They grew from deep faith, from the patriotism of the towns in which they were performed and from the proper pride of the craftsmen who presented them.

Are we then to throw aside all that we have learned and return to a false medievalism? Not on any account, for each age must find its own mode of expression within the things that it knows. If truth is perennial, it remains true though stated in different forms. The life of the Middle Ages was not our life. It was organised in a sense of the hierarchy of human society as a pattern of the divine society in heaven. Everyone knew his place, and "degree" had to be kept. It was a hard life, often cold and hungry and always full of peril, yet splendid in its times of festival. It was a life of little privacy, in which each man knew his neighbour only too well and had few illusions about him. If we try to see its drama through the eyes that saw it first, we may understand better how to present the life that we know. We may even learn what is the "public image" of the Church today, to use the latest jargon of sociology, and to interpret or correct that image as the need may be.

Medieval drama can be found today in many modernised editions. The original spelling and vocabulary are easy to master in some dialects, though texts from the north and west of England need special study. Better still, productions can be seen at York and elsewhere. The visual arts too should not be neglected; an afternoon in an old cathedral can tell us a lot about the

men who performed and watched these plays. The windows and the effigies hold the permanency of their devotion: the wood-carvings often show their liveliness and their mocking sense of humour. Irate writers of letters to the newspapers are fond of asserting that "we are not living in the Middle Ages". There is no reason why this truism should be a cause of complacency or of unqualified rejoicing.

TRAINING COURSES

CARINA ROBINS

One of the healthiest signs of growth in the Society has been the increasing demand for training. Lectures and short courses have stimulated interest in the annual Summer School, probably the most important single activity of the Society's year, and last August we broke all records in having to refuse fifty would-be students. Another milestone is the appointment of Mrs. Norma Nutman as part-time Youth Adviser, and the start of a training scheme for young people, thanks to a grant from King George's Jubilee Trust.

Encouraged by such events, the Training Committee under its newly-appointed chairman, Mr. Graham Suter, met after Easter and thrashed out a skeleton scheme to cover the next five years. In addition to the nine-day school in August and several week-ends arranged in co-operation with local organisations, the Society will hold two week-end courses a year on special subjects, and Mrs. Nutman is now planning an autumn course. These events are being planned as follows:—

Autumn 1960

This will be a practical course to meet the needs of those working with young people and will be held each Friday evening at the Central Y.M.C.A. in London from September 16th to December 2nd. Tuition will be given by professionals, who will be prepared to help students to establish dramatic work in their clubs and societies. *Application forms* are now available at Headquarters. They should be completed by August 5th.

Easter Holidays 1961

A course will be held in London from April 7th to 9th for members of the Society and Youth Leaders, on the subject of Creative Drama. It will be residential. Students from the preceding course will be invited, and during the week-end a discussion will be held between them and their tutors to consider the value or otherwise of what they have learnt, and to plan for the future.

Winter Week-end 1961

Details are not yet decided, but it is proposed to study Design.

If members have suggestions to make concerning any form of training, we will welcome their views.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

X: suitable for churches.
H: suitable for halls.

NEW PLAYS

Birth by Drowning. NORMAN NICHOLSON. (Faber and Faber, 12/6.) H. 3 acts. 7m., 5w.

The story of Elisha, by the author of *The Old Man of the Mountains*, in terms of his native Cumberland life.

Elisha is the old doctor of Dothan Dale, who hears the Lord's commands in the wind from the fell-tops. When the enemy Border-men led by Captain Naaman try to invade the dale, Elisha and his boy assistant, and the mountain mists, together lead them astray as God instructs them.

When Naaman is sent to Elisha by the Minister of Health, the message comes: "Tell him to go and wash in the beck." Elisha is astonished, as he believed only his own people were his concern, but Naaman is cured, and "Borderman and enemy are terms that have no meaning any more."

The setting is modern (or timeless); the Fells guarding the Dale—Gilboa, Ebal and Gerizim—are played by three women acting as Chorus (though there is no "choral speaking").

This entirely delightful play in prose and verse contrives to combine dry Northern humour with real beauty and wisdom of conception, and never becomes heavy or solemn. *B. J.* (Fee: apply Margery Vosper.)

Bride of the Mantle. ANDREW KEITH. (Dupliscript.) H. 2 acts, prologue, epilogue. 8m., 3w., 2 boys. An interpretation of the Celtic legends of St. Brigid. (Fee: apply author.)

The Curtain Line. CYRIL J. DAVEY. (Epworth Press, 2/-.) H. 1 act. 3m., 3w.

The son of the house has resolved to leave his sick mother and go to Africa. The Missionary Society turns him down, and the call to take his place comes to his sister's fiancé, who if he agrees must break his engagement and refuse a fine job in England.

What does he do? The last line of the play is left to audiences to discuss and supply. (Fee: 10/6, 7/6.)

Hongkong Adventure. ROBERT DUCE. (London Missionary Society, 3/6.) H. 3 acts. 4m., 4w.

A "missionary thriller". Visitors to a mission hospital in Hongkong bring a valuable T.B. drug as a gift. Dr. Li, a secret Communist, is determined to get it, blackmailing the nurse Lan Mei, framing the Chinese Christian Dr. Ku. At last he is exposed; but Dr. Ku freely consents to return to Red China to operate on Dr. Li's child, as a deliberate act of Christian love. (No fee.)

House of Promise. RAYMOND CHAPMAN. (Typescript.) 3 acts. 9m., 3w.

An unusual Christmas play for adults.

Set in passages of verse for the Shepherds and the People of Bethlehem are naturalistic scenes of the lives of a group of sophisticated people of Herod's court. The Romanised Jew, Jacob, commanded to lead the slaying of the Innocents, finds courage and faith to defy his orders. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

Hour by Hour. M. T. FERMER. (Highway Press, 1/-.) H. 1 scene. Large cast of children. *Missionary demonstration.* (No fee.)

A Little Bit of Wool. THEODORA CHADWICK. (Edinburgh House Press, 1/-.) H. 1 act (35 mins.). 5 girls, 1 child (b. or g.).

How Christian faith can conquer superstitious fears, in a hospital in the South Seas. (No fee.)

The Lost Sheep. R. H. WARD. (R.D.S./S.P.C.K., 7/6.) H. 3 acts. 3m., 5w.
A prose comedy written for World Refugee Year, but suitable for many other future occasions.

The wife of the Vicar of Fletton Fratrum has disappeared while on holiday in Germany. While the Vicar has complete faith in her, wild rumours delight the village (happy thought, one of the churchwardens is also abroad), and the national press suspect even wilder political activities.

Suddenly she arrives home with a blind refugee baby, an orphan, whom she has befriended and adventurously smuggled through Austria to England—the only way to give him a chance in life.

So much trouble and illegality to save one child—surely more must be done for the lost thousands like him?

Plays about refugees are liable to be sunk in gloom and despair: this play is about a serious situation, but handles it with such a crisp, light touch that it will be all the more welcome to groups already aware of what to expect from this celebrated writer. *B. J.* (Fees: (professional) C. Mann Ltd. (amateur), no fees until June 31st, 1961, if proceeds given to refugee funds, but the author MUST be informed previously, c/o R.D.S.)

A Question of Colour. DESMOND MOREY. (Highway Press, 1/6.) H. 1 act (approx. 30 mins.). 3m. (1 West Indian), 4w.
The son of an English suburban family brings a West Indian friend home for Christmas; they are friendly, but faced with a dilemma when a relation from South Africa arrives unexpectedly. (No fee.)

Religious Drama, vol. 3, ed. MARVIN HALVERSON. (Meridian Books, New York $1.45.) Comprising:—

1. **The Last Word.** JAMES BROUGHTON. 1 act. 1m., 1w. A man and woman awaiting a nuclear explosion, can find nothing to say in farewell to life. (Fee apply publishers.)

2./3. **The House by the Stable** and **Grab and Grace.** CHARLES WILLIAMS.

Nativity Plays

Come and Behold Him
He Came Unto His Own *by* VERA G. CUMBERLEGE
each 3*s.* 3*d. net*

The first of these plays, which lasts 45 minutes, is a simple yet moving presentation of the Nativity. Carols, for which the music is provided, form an integral part, and are mostly sung by a hidden choir. There are helpful suggestions on production.

The second portrays the purpose of God from the Creation and Fall to the Resurrection, and the life of the Church. Notes on production and music are included.

Five Plays for Christmas *by* DAPHNE JOHNSON
3*s.* 6*d. net*

These plays represent five ways, using both mime and dialogue, in which the basic theme of the Birth of Christ can be worked out by a producer with a group of unskilled actors.

The Prince of Peace *by* V. D. PEARETH 2*s.* 6*d. net*

'The author has succeeded admirably, following the biblical narrative from the Annunciation to the Flight into Egypt.' *Church Times.*

Inspection copies are available on application to
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AMEN HOUSE WARWICK SQ. E.C. 4

Santa Claus. E. E. CUMMINGS. 4 scenes, 2m., 1w., child, crowd. A verse satire. Death and Santa Claus change places amid the Christmas crowds. (Fee: apply publishers.)

Let Man Live. PÄR LAGERKVIST. 1 act. 10m., 4w. Victims of oppression down the ages give their witness in the struggle of good and evil. (Fee: apply publishers.)

It Should Happen To a Dog. WOLF MANKOWITZ. 1 act. 2m. An enchanting Jewish comedy of Jonah, the commercial traveller-turned-prophet. (Fee: apply publishers.)

Billy Budd. LOUIS O. COXE and ROBERT CHAPMAN. 3 acts. Large all-male cast. A dramatisation of Herman Melville's profound symbolic novel of Good and Evil, set on an eighteenth-century ship of the line. (Fee: apply H. Freedman, 101 Park Ave., New York 17.)

The Gospel Witch. LYON PHELPS. 10 scenes. 9m., 4w., crowd. A verse drama about the witch-hunt at Salem, Massachusetts. (Fee: apply publishers.)

Restless Drums. DACRE T. WICKS. (Edinburgh House Press, 1/-.) 3 scenes (30 mins.). 3m. or w., speaking Chorus (at least 4m., 4w.). A "missionary presentation of Africa in transition", giving a brief but telling impression on the African scene, in free-verse. (No fee.)

Set My People Free. C. J. DAVEY and P. M. WEBB. (Methodist Missionary Society, 2/-.) Full length (12 sequences). Large cast, variable to local requirements. The Albert Hall pageant celebrating the bi-centenary of the beginnings of Methodist work overseas, adaptable to smaller arenas, or a stage. (No fee.)

Ride a Tiger. ANTHONY BOOTH. (Evans Bros., 2/-.) H. 1 act. 3m., 3w. The Teddy-boy son of a widow is involved in the killing of a policeman. His tough girl friend plans to get him away; with the help of a friendly priest, for the sake of the family he breaks with her and stays to face his responsibilities. Suitable for teenage players. (Fee: £1. 1s.)

* * *

Correction

Two addresses of publishing firms were unfortunately not given correctly in the Spring number of *Christian Drama*. We apologise to the firms concerned, and give the correct addresses as follows:—

Hugh Quekett Ltd.: now taken over for *New Plays Quarterly* series by *Evans Plays, Montague House, Russell Square, London, W.C. 1.*

Methodist Youth Dept., Pages Lane, Muswell Hill, London, N. 10.

FAR AND WIDE

Australian Christian Theatre Guild

Christ in the Concrete City, a Passion Play on Channel 2 (T.V.) on Good Friday, brought the message of the Cross to the home screen with telling reality.

The play was a tele-recorded performance by the Australian Christian Theatre Guild, staged at Christ Church St Laurence in Sydney. . . .

It does not depict events leading up to the Crucifixion as the strange reactions of long ago by people in faraway places. It parallels their sins—cowardice, self-indulgence, hypocrisy, mob brutality and "the stupid sins of enormous pride"—with the "neat" sins of today's citizens.

The modern counterpart of the women who yelled with the mob for Christ's blood and later wallowed in shallow pity at His sufferings are "those maudlin women who'd cut their grandmother's throat so they could bawl at her funeral".

The A.C.T.G. gave a worthy and highly commendable account of the powerful story.

From the *Sunday Telegraph*, Sydney.

Bristol

On May 20th and 21st the Downend Religious Drama Group played Joyce Biddell's *They That Sow in Tears*, at Christ Church Parish Hall, Downend.

Their performance came near to being outstandingly memorable. Evenly balanced and a good level of acting throughout, but with failure to get over in high-relief the message of the play—the impossibility of ultimate defeat, and the courage beyond defeat, of nation or man who has been called upon by our Lord to take a share in his cross, and who accepts that call. In the sombre pattern of the play this was insufficiently lit in the final and crucial scene, where it should have pulled the whole structure of the play together, rather as the high light of a Rembrandt pins the composition as a whole.

Domonkos made less than the tortured struggle his battle should convey, though through the remainder of the play he had profoundly suggested the strength and gentleness that portray the saint. Perhaps help might have been given if the crucifix—symbol of the ultimate spiritual beauty—had been placed near the maple leaves, themselves used in the play as symbol of earthly beauty. Perhaps this would have given a focal point of dual and yet interwoven significance for Domonkos' battle and, since we are here dealing with a Catholic home, an authentic interpretation of his instinctive approach in his agony.

Congratulations on the costumes which suggested folk-dressing without over-elaboration, and Miss Wilson's workmanlike slacks and headscarf which added an authentic touch to the realistic treatment of the play as a whole.

And a final deep congratulation to all the cast without exception upon their possession in abundance of that ultimate gift of the civilised actor; the ability to be heard clearly in all parts of the house.

Derby

A dramatic portrayal of the refugee problem was recently presented in Derby and District churches by the Derby Guild of Religious Drama. The portrayal *These My Brethren* showed the refugee problem from the Christian standpoint, and in some of the churches, after evensong, took the place of the sermon.

Its purpose was not only to raise money for the Mayor of Derby's World Refugee Appeal, but to enable people to gather together to join in an act of intercession, which ended the portrayal.

Some of the twenty-five to thirty Guild Members who took part, including two children, were dressed in costume. The presentation of the subject was inspired by the *Son et Lumière* technique which has been widely used in France and recently in England.

A. E. C.

Durham

On April 29th, the L.E.A.R.D. Group under their Producer, Nan Hunter, gave an impressive performance of Gordon Daviot's play, *The Little Dry Thorn*, to an audience in the Parochial Hall, Meadowfield.

Here is a play which deals with a familiar Old Testament story in such a fresh and human way that its message of a justified faith in the power of God becomes immediately relevant to life in the twentieth century. The action traces the fortunes of Abraham, beginning with his life in Ur. We witness his and his family's reactions to God's call and see him, during his years of wandering, as a man led by a strong trust in God, which none of those closest to him can fully understand. His wife eventually learns to share her husband's trust completely and the play ends with the reward of faith—the birth of Isaac in Sara's old age—and the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael.

This was an extremely thoughtful and moving production, which held the audience's attention at all times. To a great extent, this was due to the very high standard of acting, for one felt that the players had really managed to identify themselves with the Old Testament characters.

Considerable attention had obviously been paid to detail. There were the brief programme notes, for example, which gave an appropriate quotation from the Book of Genesis, indicating the part of the Biblical narrative which the scene enacted in detail. The costumes were particularly attractive in their simplicity of design and careful choice of colour. They gave an overall impression pleasing to the eye, as well as being appropriate to the characters themselves.

It would be impossible to single out the performances of individuals for particular mention, for the production

was essentially a well-balanced one. All the actors on the stage became real people, whose actions arose naturally from the personalities portrayed. The audience witnessed the impetuosity of the hot-blooded Hagar, who, because of her nature, failed to understand the unselfishness of Sara. We could smile understandingly at the gossiping, pleasure-loving, but lovable Milcah and admire the dignity and calm of Abraham.

For the audience, this was indeed a memorable evening and credit and thanks are certainly due to Nan Hunter and her Players for providing it.

ZILLAH K. BALLARD.

Edinburgh

The Foot of the Cross (A. A. Baker).

Yet once again the power of drama and theatre in presenting the truth of the Gospel Story has been realised. The compelling presentation of fact and truth by those who are intent in discovering truth and fact for themselves, once experienced is not easily forgotten.

It was at St Martin's Church in the Magdalene and Bingham housing estate on the east side of Edinburgh that this presentation was made on Good Friday evening. As twilight had flickered away and darkness took sway in the sanctuary, the beams of light from side lamps focused on the Cross and then on the lesser cross bearing a dying thief. Here it was that the whole drama of reason and counter reason was played out by Mary, Mother of Jesus; the Roman soldier; John the beloved disciple; and Mary Magdalene.

The young people of the Youth Club of this church, who are themselves folk who live on this same estate, are seeking to identify themselves with the church, and on this occasion rendered to the church a real service—and provided a devotional experience of great value.

It is to be hoped that many others who are trying to lead young people into the way of the Cross, will in fact themselves give teenagers opportunity of being led in such a way as this.

W. G. B.

Greenford, Middlesex

On the Saturday before Palm Sunday some six parish churches in the Greenford and Northolt area united in a public "Act of Witness". The Act took the form of a procession from one of the parish churches, up a hill and through a busy shopping centre to another of the parish churches, where a sermon was preached by a member of a religious community. As the spearhead of the procession were some fifty to sixty people dressed in Palestinian costume of the first century A.D. This group portrayed in mime, at fixed points on the route, some ten of the traditional Stations of the Cross, beginning with the condemnation of Jesus staged in the forecourt of the first church, and ending with the setting up of the cross in the churchyard of the second church. The part of the Christus was undertaken by an unknown priest from a different part of the London diocese. At each station a priest with a microphone made the traditional announcement of the Station while those taking part maintained the tableau of it, and the whole procession, which finally totalled some 400 people, made the responses to the prayer "O Saviour of the world. . . ."

Rehearsals occurred on most Sunday evenings during Lent, and in most of the parishes were a substitute for at least one other form of lenten devotion. Before the Procession of Witness began, each of the churches taking part processed, headed by servers with the processional cross, the priest of the parish, and the costumed performers, through their own shopping areas to the church from which the main procession started. Here the "Act of Witness" was preceded by a quarter of an hour's silent prayer.

Quite apart from the immediate effects on those who saw the procession, full coverage and a large photograph in the local press on Maundy Thursday did mean that the procession achieved its purpose of proclaiming to those who would otherwise ignore it, the fact, and the solemnity of Good Friday, and of the Cross.

F. N. T.

Headington, Oxford

Plays like *The Way of the Cross* by Henri Ghéon, performed by religious players in churches, are of particular interest at the moment, if only because they show the influence of the Religious Drama Society over the years. To begin with in watching this production on Palm Sunday at St Andrew's Church, we had doubts. Is this how Pamela Keily is to be translated to far flung chancels? Is *that* the result of Carina Robins' work, standing in tears among this alien corn?

This performance to begin with seemed to have the intensity of Pamela Keily's production without Pamela Keily's thought to give it depth. Here seemed to be Carina Robins' training used to present old religious confusion writ large. It needed some minutes to correct the impression. Then it became clear that the producer, influenced as he may have been by religious drama schools, had worked out his own pattern for the play. From these players, these simple costumes, the high-slung lights, the music, a pattern began to appear that was strong, original and effective. Simply, the players moved in this pattern of creation, persecution, judgment and death. The invisible nails pierced God's hands and feet. We in the congregation were the torturers and the tortured, the mother by the Cross and the disciples. This then was fact? . . . *fact?* . . . this the meaning of those old words?—but we had forgotten. How could these actors, these ordinary people, create again the great reality we had forgotten? The words that so often drone like sleepy bees in the derelict gardens of the modern church were suddenly agonising, unbearable. "And they crucified Him . . .": "Woman, behold your Son . . .". Outside the church a bird twittered, in the Oxford suburb. A car rattled along to Calvary. Timeless we sat in a building of stone. The tomb was opened—and was empty . . . before our eyes . . . empty. Christ had risen.

The play came to an end. The actors departed. We stared at our wooden pews, thumbed the dog-eared hymn-books. Light fell on the stonework of a pillar. It was beautiful.

By simple art a few people—from the Cowley factories, from the town and gown of Oxford, from shops and the new redbrick of the suburbs all round—had touched the finger of God, had opened our eyes, had lightened the darkness of our imagination. The producer, Leslie Taylor, had taken Henri Ghéon's script and had re-created the passion of Christ for us with all the strength and imagination at his command. Skill had carved out the work before us as a craftsman had carved the stone on which the light fell.

O. M. W.

Hornchurch, Essex

The drama group at Holy Cross Church, Hornchurch, have followed up their bold beginning of *The Good Samaritan*, in modern dress on a lorr with an equally unusual presentation *Forgotten People*, by A. J. Bradbury.

This one-act play shows the refug Kowalski family, who can go to t States at last, thanks to the help of friendly American girl, but must lea their crippled daughter behind. In t end, they cannot leave her, and fa camp life again for an indefinite time.

It was produced as part of a week activities on behalf of World Refug Year funds. With an exhibition refugee life, the play was toured several local churches and performe " in the round " the seats being arrange in a complete circle about the few chair table and camp-bed that made up th set.

This presented some difficulties to th actors—for instance, it is not easy gaze convincingly through a no existent " window ", when the view blocked by interested pairs of eyes a fe feet away—but this immediacy drew th audience into the action, and the actin throughout had a pace and a depth feeling that were completely convincin at close range.

B. J.

Iowa, U.S.A.

Dr. Louis Haselmayer writes:—

" I staged an *Easter Sepulchre Pla* here " (at Iowa Wesleyan College " during Easter week; it is a dramati fragment from Winchester, *circa* 975 A.D

" We began to action with th Blessing and 9th Lesson of Matins, an ended with the Te Deum—thus the littl fragment was given its proper liturgica setting. The play was performed on regular auditorium stage with curtain . . the stage set in very simplified form wit altar, Easter sepulchre and a sma monastic choir. We used lighting proper liturgical vestments, and built u the action of the showing of the clot with some theatrical but still liturgicall oriented movements. . . .

" The whole presentation was devo tional and liturgical rather than thea trical and brought forth an amazin response from an audience who had littl background in either church drama o liturgical worship."

Kent

A most stimulating and happy schoo was held, under the auspices of th Religious Drama Society of Grea

ritain, at the Westerham County econdary School on April 20th. Mrs. /akefield, Drama Adviser to the Kent ounty Drama Committee, took the hair and the Rev. P. P. Kirwin, Vicar f St Mary's Church, Westerham, acted s Chaplain. The tutors were Miss rsula Nicholl of the R.D.S. of G.B. nd Mr. Donald Doggett, East Sussex ounty Drama Adviser. The fifty-four udents who attended were of all ages nd included some clergy and members f Youth Clubs and Dramatic Societies. fter a morning spent in classes for peech and Movement the afternoon nd evening were given up to rehearsing rief excerpts from R. H. Ward's *Holy amily*, and Obey's *Noah*. Talks were iven on "Stage Management" and Choosing the Play". At the end of he day the students expressed great ppreciation of the work done by the rganisers, Mr. Geoffrey Hewitt and ther members of the Chantry Players, evenoaks. A lively discussion followed nd all hoped that similar schools in ther centres would be organised in the ear future.

K. B-B.

iverpool

On Monday and Tuesday, April 4th nd 5th, the Church of the Good hepherd A.D.S., Liverpool, presented he play *People of Nowhere* by James Brabazon.

It is a play full of a stark reality deigned to bring home to all of us the agic plight of World Refugees.

The whole of the auditorium was lesigned to represent a Refugee Camp vith notices in English and German, and he stage was the home of the Polish amily, the Maczeks.

The audience saw a happy, healthy amily, parents, two sons and daughter, radually reduced over the years to opelessness and despair, through no ault of their own.

Each individual taking part was careully chosen by the producer and each haracter was therefore well defined.

The author had written the play for Vorld Refugee Year, and it certainly noved all who witnessed it and all who ook part in its presentation.

E. T.

Manchester

I began to understand what the Psalmist meant by "The mountains kipped like rams" when I saw Norman Nicholson's new play *Birth by Drowning*. For Ebal, Gerizim and Gilboa are three rampaging ladies who set the scene and speak the echoes for Elisha to perform the works of God. The audience was quick to see the brilliant wit and poetic beauty that flowed from these human mountains! What could sound more frightening to a producer than a chorus of mountains? Yet Miss P. Keily with a group of Manchester Diocesan players made such a novel idea work very effectively.

With the simplest of sets, which any parish production could make, and with costumes both colourful and of imaginative design, the Lake District again comes to life as the author's setting for doctor Elisha and his apprentice Gehazi who is an irrepressible youngster. Here among the fells and dales, not forgetting the little beck, Elisha faces one difficult situation after another during and after his surgery hours. It is the last situation, however, which is the most difficult for Elisha himself. How can he cure Naaman, his country's enemy? Surely God doesn't use His cures so indiscriminately? Elisha learns his lesson as Naaman is healed, but the folks of the dales still haven't understood. Will they every understand how God's mercy is given?

In a play of such simple beauty and humour we were entertained and enlightened by Old Testament characters with, what many might call, a modern outlook. When this play was taken from the Free Trade Hall into a parish hall it proved even more effective. Here is great encouragement for parish groups, especially as Faber and Faber have now published the play.

D. N. H. C.

Paddock Wood, Kent

The Case of Magdalene Elliot by Elizabeth Stucley was performed in St Andrew's Church, Paddock Wood, Kent, on the nights of April 6th, 7th, and 8th. The setting of the play was almost ideal. The church is new, using brick in a pleasing and original way and leaving plenty of room for the actors between the choir stalls. Here the very breadth was a handicap as it sometimes led to the grouping being too broad for comfort. The lighting was cleverly arranged and kept everyone visible without destroying the church atmosphere. The production achieved a high sense of

reality both individually and collectively and although a feeling of diffidence (perhaps due to inexperience in some of the smaller parts) was noticeable, yet in every case there was a true feeling for character. The Rector and Magdalene Elliott, both difficult parts, sustained their characters throughout, the calm quiet control of the Priest balancing the bewildered and restless superficial selfishness of the girl. Each of the witnesses spoke their parts well and built up the background to Magdalene's life convincingly though the calling of the witnesses and the oath-taking could well have been speeded up. Magdalene's small group of friends acted with charm and brought a welcome touch of humour. The Lover and the Husband gave well contrasted performances but the announcement of the death of the child was played too flatly by all concerned and could have been built up. The Sergeant looked like a real policeman without any guying of the part and the Conscience did another difficult part well. Here perhaps the costume was a handicap. If she had been clothed in a copy of Magdalene's own clothes and veiled instead of hooded she could have given the idea of being Magdalene's better self. The transference from modern to medieval with the coming of the Seven Deadly Sins was done with great skill. The darkened stage, the very realistic thunder, timing and pace were extremely good and we arrived literally with a bang in the Middle Ages and without any sense of incongruity. The Sins acted their parts with verve and characterisation and carried off the whole thing with conviction. The message of the play got across well. The insistance on it not being her fault and the hopelessness ensuing brought out the contrast when by open confession and acceptance of responsibility she made the Sins powerless to harm her.

K. P.

Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia

From a letter:

" Our Course was a rather exciting one, being the first of its kind. It was an inter-racial Drama Production Course, at Gokomere R.C. Mission, near Fort Victoria. We had lectures, and discussions on all aspects of religious play production, and practical classes in which we practised improvisations and did some speech and movement. The course was attended by Europe: Fathers, Brothers and Sisters; Afric Sisters; and African lay teachers (bo men and women). During the week rehearsed, under Course produce three scenes, one from *Christmas in t Market Place*, one from *The Patriar of Peace* by Dom Romanos Rios, abo the life of St Benedict, and one in Sho (the local African language) about t raising of the widow's son. The pla were performed on the last evening the Mission's vast open-air amph theatre, built of granite hewn on the sit The Mission belongs to the Bethlehe Fathers, and the course was directed Fr. A. Fischer and myself " (Miss Ma I. Gordon).

Sheffield

Amateur dramatic talent can be p to various uses, but it is seldom e ployed to better effect, or under mo rigorous imaginative discipline, tha prevails in a performance directed Miss Pamela Keily for the Sheffie Religious Drama organisation.

An excellent example of such wor was seen at the Carver Street Methodi Hall, where Miss Keily's players a peared in Mr. Norman Nicholson's ne play *Birth by Drowning*.

This play is the Cumberland poet sequel to his *Old Man of the Mountai* and the scene is again in the nort country fells. The mantle of Elijah— patched morning coat—has fallen Elisha, who appears as a village doct prescribing the simple yet exacting rem dies of faith and humility, under th direction of God's word echoing acro the mountains. The mountains the selves, embodied in three ruggedly-cl and earthy-voiced crones, guide a comment on the action.

Individual subtleties matter less tha the broad emphasis of the production— and there are times when emphas might perhaps have been tempered wi a little more naturalism.

By kind permission of the *Sheffield Telegraph.*

Southgate

The Southgate Council of Christi Churches chose T. S. Eliot's *Murder the Cathedral* for its touring productio in April and May this year, with a co pany drawn from twelve memb churches. Eleven local churches different denominations were visited.

The production by Edgar Chaplin was mple and straightforward, well arnged for adaptation to the various apes and sizes of church building that d to be used, and though the quality performance was uneven, the comny as a whole was excellently spoken, d the verse received more loving care phrasing and delivery than is common wadays. Becket's sermon, in particur, was moving and effective. On the her hand the Knight's Debate was eak, and should have been played ore boldly for laughs, church or no urch.

In the week of the failure of the mmit Conference, when I saw the ay, the early passages anxiously nquiring after meetings of Kings and ishops, and the sense of being engulfed " the doom on the house, the doom n the world " had an unwonted relance. One wonders however if the lay is at last beginning to date. It is a gnificant moment for any modern assic when an enthusiast begins, " Of ourse, this was a pioneer work in its ay. . . ." It is also a shock to realise nat a fair proportion of the present eneration of theatregoers first met *Murder in the Cathedral* as a set book or G.C.E. How many works of art urvive that honour?

B. J.

Southwark

A member of the group writes:

" The annual full-scale production of he Southwark Cathedral Religious Drama Group, directed by Ursula Nicholl, which takes place in the Chapter House late in Lent, has to fulfil certain definite conditions. All members of the roup, if possible, must take part; the lay must be staged on a completely pen platform, with no more setting han a few rostra; and following the radition built up over six years, it must or preference be hard-hitting, experinental, and modern.

" This year, the Rev. Philip Turner's *Christ in the Concrete City* filled the bill. The first condition was satisfied by xpanding the original cast of four men, wo women, to five men, ten women, edistributing the lines—a method possile in this type of stylised play, and lready successfully used in *The Way of he Cross*. This meant that more laborate mime could be used than is sually possible. Some chorus passages could be developed into little scenes, for instance, the speeches describing the Creation, though some were spoken by players arranged in a geometrical pattern.

" Audiences have sometimes found it difficult, in this play, to distinguish between the inset historical scenes, and the modern commentary—the transition is deliberately abrupt and startling, and can be too swift unless care is taken to make it clear on which plane the action is taking place at any given moment. In this case, choral passages and strictly contemporary by-play were given in the company's ' uniform ' of white shirts and dark trousers for the men, white blouses and black skirts for the girls, and in harsh brilliant lighting. For historical scenes, simple cloaks and headscarves were assumed, the lighting was warmer and more colourful, and the acting more naturalistic.

" The cast found the play demanding of precision and teamwork, and it was felt that ' the statement was interesting, but tough '. This, however, in a field where softness is a permanent quicksand, we believe is all to the good."

Stourbridge, Worcs.

From the ringing opening words, " We have come to tread with you the Way of the Cross," to the final triumphant singing of the Mozart " *Ave Verum* ", the congregation of St Thomas's Church, Stourbridge, did indeed tread the way of the Cross, together with this devoted band of young actors and actresses. Henri Ghéon's *The Way of the Cross*, produced in Holy Week by the Anglican Young People's Association, was no easy, sentimental success, but a living witness. In face of such effort who dares to say that modern young people do not care?

Through the whole of Olive Dukes' production there shone a deep and compelling sincerity, completely interpreted to the congregation by the players.

The stage itself was simple—so simple as to appear stark—six steps to a platform in a chancel not eight feet wide, rising to a secondary platform ten feet in the rear, approached by three more steps. The most skilful use was made of this restricted space, and imaginatively used lighting, three floodlights and a small spotlight, brought everyone present to join in the procession to Calvary.

Restraint in gesture pointed the sureness of the presence of an invisible Christ. The slow compelling hammer strokes at the Crucifixion brought bated breath, and a feeling of panic, that we were there watching, wishing to strike those taunting figures.

If the intention was to disturb complacency, and to rouse almost unwanted thoughts, then this play was largely successful.

The stained-glass window colours of the simple robes, and the purposeful definite movement was reminiscent of El Greco, and the total effect was obviously the product of deep thought, and prayerful rehearsal.

What a joy too, to be able to hear every word, in spite of great variation in pace, tone and volume—and never a word from the prompter.

This Group is improving wonderfully, and a sincerity shines out of their work, which can draw attention away from occasional difficulties of technique.

Tunbridge Wells, Kent

The Tunbridge Wells Fellowship of Players presented two plays in the Assembly Rooms during Holy Week on behalf of World Refugee Year Fund. *Christ in the Concrete City* was ably produced and acted with great competence. The choral speaking was beautifully clear and the grouping and movement were most effective, though a more austere background would have given greater point and dignity. The human element—the vivacity and humour—came across extremely well, but when we arrived at the Way to Calvary, which rather curiously, was staged at the back, the mime and speech were not so easy to follow. It is difficult to understand why, when throughout the Presence of Christ is suggested and indicated but not seen, there was a sudden parting of the curtains revealing an effigy of Christ on the Cross. It was out of keeping, to say the least, and the terrific force of the last passages which usually leave one gasping, was obliterated by the singing of a small boy.

This was followed by the first appearance of an interesting and touching play, *Easter Will Come Tomorrow*, by Kenneth Phillips. It is the story of a little band of Christians in a communist state. It was not altogether easy to grasp the circumstances and background and a word or two of explanation on the programme would have helped. The Christian farmer, evidently a man much influence in the community, ar his family are given the chance to recar He gives way momentarily but is recalle by the absolute faith of his wife ar daughter and they are sent out execution. The young guard who earli has become interested in the words Scripture, and has received from th farmer the gift of his own Bible, is foun reading it by the Commissar and ordere to burn it. He does so, but the i destructibility of the Christian Faith symbolised by a procession of peasant each one of whom lights a taper from th flames of the burning Bible.

Special music had been composed fc two pianos by Peter O'Brien and wa played by him and Christopher Higwooc It was a joy to have live music.

It is to be hoped that this talente group of players which had evidentl put a tremendous amount of work an thought into the production, will cor tinue to present religious drama and wi build up an appreciative audience i Tunbridge Wells.

K. B-B.

* * *

A simple and moving production c *People of Nowhere* by James Brabazon was presented by Helen Clarke at th Congregational Church, Tunbridg Wells in March. It was evident tha great trouble had been taken to provid the right setting and feeling and th actors brought out the poignancy an hopelessness of the situation. All th details had been carefully thought out but one could not help doubting whethe the clothes of such a self-respecting family would not have been more shabby and worn. Helen Clarke and the player should continue to work together and tc give further productions.

K. B-B.

St John's Wood, London

" Your Parish and the Colour Bar "—" Your Parish and the Refugees " this was the theme of a ten-minute passion play—an open-air mime—performed outside St John's Wood Church by members of the congregation and produced by Ursula M. Nicholl in Holy Week. Three performances were given each night. The night I went was bitterly cold but I had to stay and see it a second time. There was a large cross, about 20 feet high, set up in the grounds

n front of the church and the scenes vere played round this. First the istorical scene of the Crucifixion, vhich was very moving, but the play hit ut when we saw the modern ones: a ewish refugee family trying to escape ersecution and being caught, man-andled, their possessions flung to the round, the crowd grabbing all they ould lay their hands on and finally the ld father crucified on a wooden cross.

Then we moved to a dance hall with roungsters rocking and rolling. A girl omes in with a coloured boy, all is well ntil he asks her to dance, a fight starts nd the coloured boy is killed and again he undertakers put him on a wooden ross.

The climax came for me when the two wooden crosses were raised up and we aw these two men in their modern everyday clothes and I realised again now our Lord is crucified here and now by us every day.

Lastly two Angels with flaming swords came out of the main church doors and raised the two men from their crosses and escorted them into the church. John and Mary Magdalene came out and took in the Jewish mother and her son and daughter and the coloured boy's girl friend, the crowd melted away and we were left to—" think on these things ".

B. I. P.

Wormwood Scrubs

" Funny Play, Scouse, en it? Never fink that bloke 's a parson, would yer! " So said one of the audience at the Scrubs when Fr. Knight and the Deanery Players brought *The Trial of Jimmy Brown* here in Holy Week. My own reaction was, " What would I do in his position? " for to coin a phrase, " it makes yer fink! "

From the acting point of view, whilst Fr. Knight gave an excellent performance, it was most noticeable that all the company played their parts with ease and competence. Playing in front of curtains is not the easiest of media, and the whole cast were able to " hold " their audience in the first few minutes—a vital necessity in any play, but certainly so where " Scrubs-type " audiences are concerned. Contrary to popular belief, the long-term members of our community see a great many dramatic performances, and become quite critical of the mediocre.

Religion is not a popular topic in prison, but even though few men will admit it, most of us do wonder what life is all about, for we have plenty of time in which to think. Some find an answer, and some too confused by bitterness or pride, do not. This sort of play can do a great deal to start a train of thought, which will inspire even the most mundane of us to think about eternity. In turn that may lead to a comparison with our present lives, and perhaps a determination to do better to justify our existence to our Father.

This play hits one over the head with one point. If you are of the Recreation — Procreation — Depreciation — Elimination—Fraternity, something is missing. Something that no man can define.

But this play left me with an impression that in man there is a steady progression in his personality towards a climax which he cannot avoid. He either wanders towards it blindly, walks to it purposefully, or edges towards it fearfully, until the time comes when he hits a spiritual wall. What then? Full stop? It raises endless queries. Does the impetus generated in that progression carry on something of the man, something we can't hear, see, or feel? One's mind must meditate after seeing this play upon the mystery and vastness of eternity—though I am willing to concede that a prison cell is more conducive to introspection and contemplation than a sitting-room fireside!

N. L. B.

Articles and letters for publication in *Christian Drama* should be sent to the Editor, c/o The Religious Drama Society, 166 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.C. 2. Articles should preferably be typed, in double spacing. Letters must be accompanied by the name and address of the sender, but may be printed under a pseudonym if desired. Contributions for the Winter number should be received not later than October 10th, 1960.

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